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Diplomacy Lacking in Squabble at State

If you think the government's supersecret intelligence analysis is conducted in an atmosphere of cool, calm efficiency, let us take you behind the scenes at the State Department during one recent international crisis. Eyewitness accounts make the hush-hush Intelligence and Research Office sound like the officers' mess on the good ship Caine at strawberry time.

On the bridge was Gerald Sutton, chief of State's terrorist intelligence branch. At the helm, so to speak, was intelligence analyst Julia Rottier. Here's how she began her subsequent report:

"On Feb. 4, 1986, at approximately 10 a.m., the current intelligence watch was handling the Israeli interception of a Libyan plane. Mr. Sutton's analysts were apprised of the incoming traffic, which was mainly press items." (There's a jolt: State Department spooks, with all their resources, knew only what they got from the press.)

The Israelis had forced down the Libyan jet expecting to find terrorists aboard. But they found only indignant Arab diplomats.

Twenty minutes after the first incoming "traffic," Rottier reported, the first intelligence cable arrived—with bad information. "The information really did not add anything new to the press reports except for the erroneous note that the aircraft was a 727," she reported.

In the midst of this fairly tense situation, Rottier wrote, Sutton "stormed into the watch area" and demanded "vociferously" to know why he had not been informed of recent developments.

The reason was that there had been none, but when Rottier tried to explain this to Sutton, he

shouted at her, "Shut, up, damn it!" according to her report. A few moments later he yelled at her: "Sit down!"

Half a dozen intelligence analysts sat bewildered by the boss's outburst. Analyst James Maxstadt wrote in a memo that while he and Rottier were working on "flashboard" (computer) messages, Sutton stood "berating [Rottier] for not calling as many people as he would have wished."

Rottier's report to her boss, Paul Molineaux, chief of current intelligence, said that Sutton's verbal flogging had her "almost in tears . . . I was publicly and severely abused and humiliated. My colleagues and I find Mr. Sutton's behavior appalling, unacceptable, abnormal, abrasive, abusive and, most of all, unprofessional."

In his own report on the incident, Molineaux noted that Rottier "is a competent, hardworking employee," and added: "[Her] description of Mr. Sutton's language and demeanor is consistent with my own observations of his approach to problems and interpersonal relationships."

Molineaux concluded: "Thus, the episode of which Ms. Rottier writes is not merely an aberration. Rather, it is a more bald manifestation of a general pattern of behavior."

Sutton declined to discuss the Feb. 4 incident. However, he seems to have friends as well as critics in Foggy Bottom. He was not selected for promotion to the senior executive service and will be leaving the Foreign Service. But sources told us that plans are afoot to rehire him as a civil service employee. One source familiar with the situation said this is legal, but is "a travesty of the whole system."